

Expo Line Phase 2 Scoping Comments

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Introduction

Friends 4 Expo Transit is the independent group of volunteers formed in 2000 to support a fast, safe, comfortable transit line in the Exposition corridor. Some of our members have been active for over 17 years.

We are not advocating one route option or the other for Phase 2 of the Expo Line before its Draft EIS/EIR is complete. We expect environmental study of all appropriate route options with comprehensive engagement of neighboring communities in planning route details and mitigations. **Full study of the alternatives' station locations, cost, travel time, ridership, and environmental impacts and mitigations will enable an informed decision.**

We note that an alternative going further down Venice Boulevard to Venice, as some have advocated be added to the Phase 2 options studied, **would not fulfill the purpose of the Expo Line going to Santa Monica**, especially to serve the huge number of west-bound commuters jamming the I-10 freeway to jobs in West Los Angeles and Santa Monica.

Following are our recommendations to be studied in this environmental process.

- ***Venice-Robertson station***

Severe traffic at the Venice-Robertson intersection (right) calls for **grade separation**, whether continuing on the right-of-way or along Venice Boulevard. If on the right-of-way it should **not preclude** a future light rail branch west on Venice.



We also seek acceleration from Phase 2 **into Phase 1** of the **aerial Culver City station** (between Venice and Washington Boulevards) as soon as the alignment for Phase 2 has been determined. This would eliminate the construction cost and inconvenient access of the Phase 1 interim terminus station at Wesley Street.

Right-of-Way Option

- *Station location in Palms*

Palms has some of the highest population density on the Westside, with one Census tract containing over 30,000 people per square mile.

A well-located **station** on the right-of-way between National and Motor is key to serving Palms from the north. **Good pedestrian access** is particularly important. These three candidate locations should be evaluated:



- West of the bridge where Palms and National Boulevards intersect (left side of the photo), for convenient transfers from the Santa Monica Big Blue Bus #12;
- Behind Price Self Storage, a large potential parking and transit-oriented development (TOD) site;
- At or near the Motor Avenue bridge.

- *Cheviot trench pedestrian bridge*

After passing through the tunnel under the freeway, the 100-foot-wide right-of-way is in this trench on the southwest edge of Cheviot Hills (right side of photo).

The **pedestrian bridge** to Palms Park (left side of photo) is around 25 feet high and spans over 40 feet. This is an important community linkage and should remain (or be replaced if necessary).



Retention of the mature trees along Northvale Avenue is important.

- *Noise on curved track*

This section contains almost the **only curved track** on the Expo Line. It will be important to mitigate **“squeal” noise** from wheels via appropriate super-elevation (also to maintain **higher speed**), flange lubrication, or other techniques here. See also the landscaped berm below.

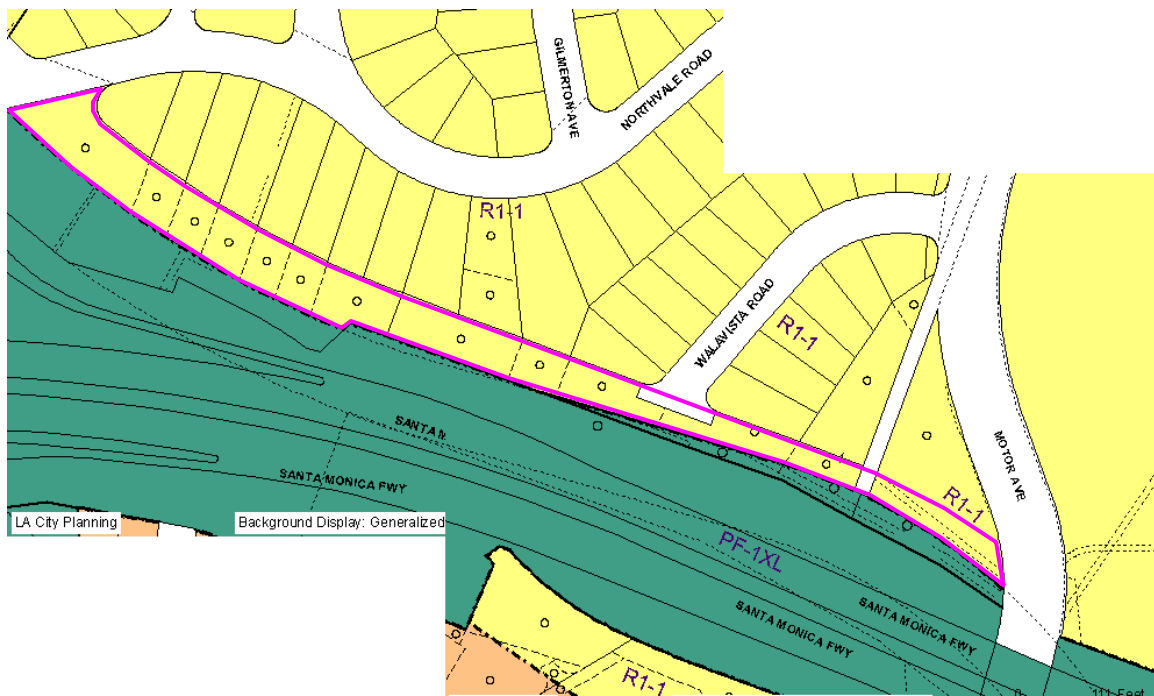
Funding **extension of the new I-10 freeway sound walls** to further reduce freeway noise in the neighborhood should be considered as additional noise mitigation.

- **Easement for bike path?**

There is a restricted-use **easement**, owned by the City of Los Angeles, that is an extension of Northvale Avenue separating properties on the south side of Northvale Road from the Exposition right-of-way and the I-10 freeway (the embankment on right of photo). These are the yellow parcels marked with an “o” and outlined in pink on the map below.



This easement could be used to **extend the Exposition bike path to Motor Avenue**. One could then consider a **bicycle bridge** across Motor, suspended beneath the freeway bridge, from the northwest corner to the southeast corner, to the bike path continuing east along the right-of-way.



- **Landscaped berm**

This short section of Northvale Avenue is below the level of the right-of-way. If the tracks were not depressed here, addition of a **landscaped earth berm** above the existing embankment would provide an attractive, graffiti-proof, sound barrier.



- **Overland Ave. underpass**

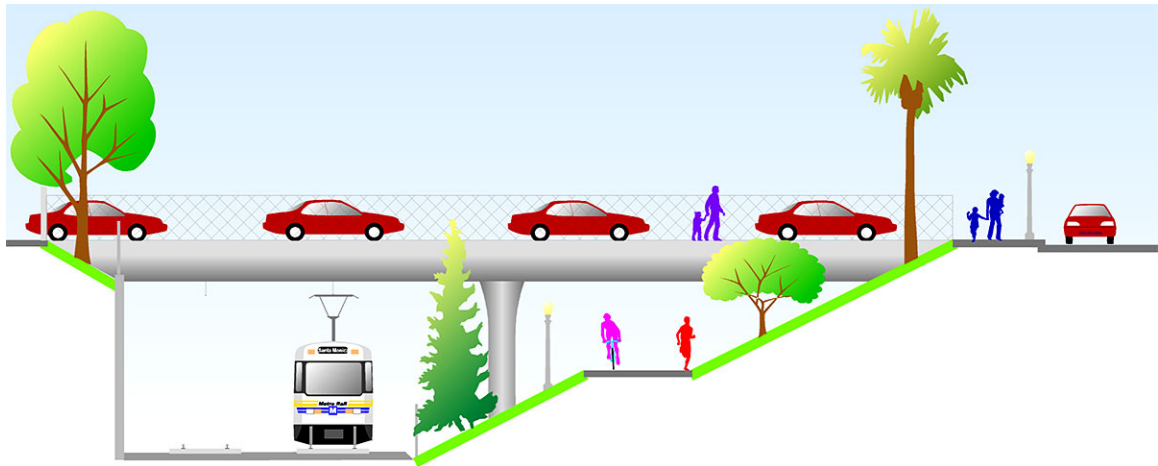
Traffic volumes on Overland Avenue appear to exceed the criteria for specifying a **grade separation** in the 2003 *MTA Grade Crossing Policy*. A local EIR counted a 2005 PM peak on Overland southbound below Pico of 2,617 (1,309 per lane), which exceeds the upper Threshold 3 into “Grade separation usually required”.

Overland Avenue Elementary School (right in photo) borders Overland and Northvale Avenues (as Charnock Road Elementary School borders Sepulveda Boulevard). Planning for **student safety** is crucial at all school locations.



These **power lines** along Overland would need to be relocated for an aerial grade separation. They are also a counterpoint to objections about light rail overhead catenary wires.

It has long been a compelling idea to **extend the existing trench** to an **Overland light rail and bike path underpass**, as in this sketch:



There is, however, the complication of a large concrete box **storm drain** running under Overland. Its outside dimensions are 11'-9" high x 12'-8" wide, with its top about 5 feet below the old rail tops¹. An 18" main sewer parallels it about 4 feet deeper.

A new **inverted siphon** section is a possibility for carrying storm flows below depressed light rail tracks under Overland.

¹ Its 1940 plans are available at <http://engvault.lacity.org/apps/vault/>. Index sheet number is D-5756-1; plan and profile for Overland at Exposition is sheet D-5759; and section details are on sheet D-5769.

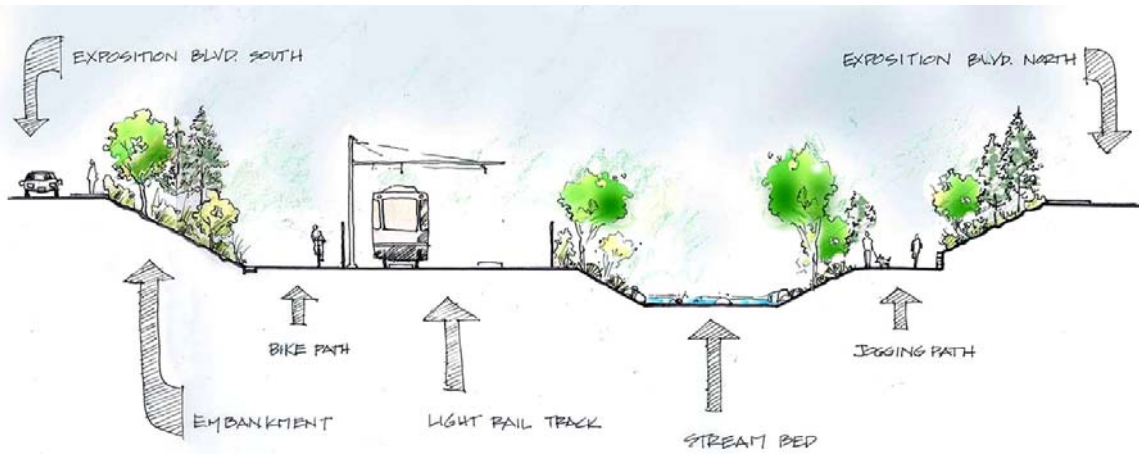
- **Restored watershed**

Discussion of the storm drain led to a concept to combine the **unique opportunities** of:

- The 200-foot-wide (between back fences) section from Overland to Westwood (right);
- Depressed rail and bikeway route;
- Restored streambed and park as an urban water quality project.



Storm drain water would flow into a new “daylighted” **streambed** connecting the Overland, Military, and/or Midvale-Kelton storm drains, to percolate into the soil. Flow could be west-to-east to follow the slope down to the Overland underpass. Here are two concept sketches, courtesy of Light Rail for Cheviot:



Use of the wide right-of-way for this configuration of light rail tracks in a shallow, soil-lined trench with short underpass structure may be **no more costly**, and is certainly **much less visually impacting** than a conventional overpass with retained-fill ramps edged with soundwalls. **Water quality funds** may complement transit funds for this.

Provision of this wetland area may also serve to **mitigate** the Expo Line’s environmental impact of increasing runoff from impervious surfaces².

We strongly recommend this underpass option receive full study in the Draft EIS/EIR. It may be the best resolution of a grade separation at Overland for this neighborhood, and its unique location and water quality benefits make it consistent with adopted Phase 1 mitigations.

- **Station at Westwood Blvd.**

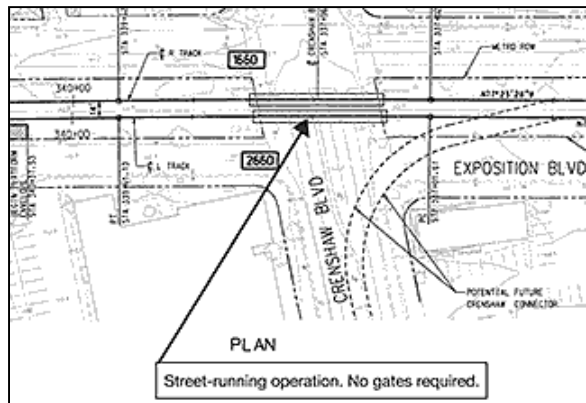
The best **station location** is likely east and/or west of Westwood Boulevard, a major bus corridor. Santa Monica's Big Blue Bus #8 (National-Ocean Park – right) and #12 (Palms) lines connect to **Westwood and UCLA**. Culver City's #3 line from Fox Hills and Culver City connects to **Century City**.



A “neighborhood station” with good transit connections and **no parking** may be best here. A large parking lot or structure would attract significant new traffic, and the park-watershed concept would not leave space for it. In any case, existing **preferential parking** south of the Westside Pavilion can be extended to prevent overflow parking on neighboring streets.

Shared-use parking should be investigated at the **Westside Pavilion**. With frequent shuttle service to the Expo Line it could both provide an alternative to residential street parking and enhance commercial activity in and around the mall.

Signal control instead of gates at Westwood – following the precedent of the Crenshaw grade crossing (right) – fits this location of a station in the median of Exposition Boulevard, eliminates bell and horn noise, and would provide the neighborhood a **needed pedestrian and bike signal** to cross Westwood.



Existing **pedestrian crossings of the right-of-way** at Westwood and Military must be retained.

² See chapter 4, “Methods and Mechanisms,” *Ballona Creek Watershed Management Plan*, at [http://ladpw.org/wmd/watershed/bc/bcmp/docs/june04/Ch%204%20Methods%20\(20040602\).pdf](http://ladpw.org/wmd/watershed/bc/bcmp/docs/june04/Ch%204%20Methods%20(20040602).pdf)

Venice-Sepulveda Option

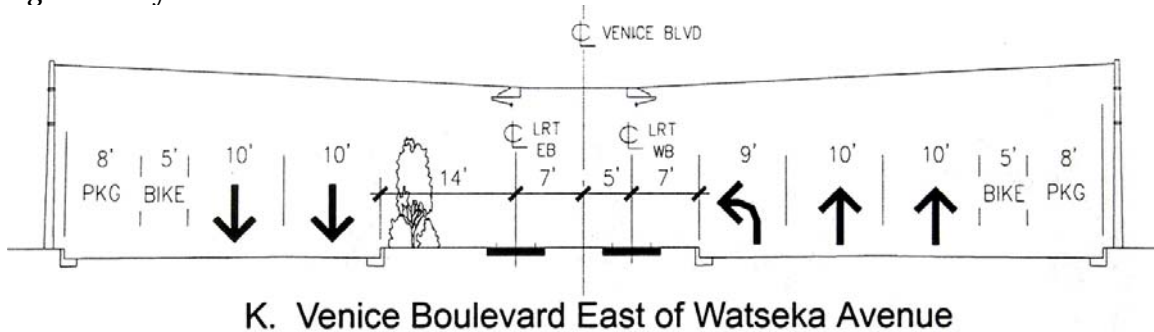
- **Loss of traffic lanes and other impacts on Venice Blvd.**

Venice Boulevard between Robertson and Culver Boulevards (shown here looking west) is very congested, with three lanes in each direction and double left turn lanes.



An **aerial alignment** from the Culver City station west of the historic Ivy Substation may be needed here, although even space for columns would be difficult.

The Venice Blvd. section drawing (below) from the 2001 *Draft EIS/EIR* (Figure 2D-7) shows **loss of one traffic lane** in each direction. Additional impacts to **cross traffic, parking, and adjacent businesses** that appear to be using former Venice Boulevard right-of-way should be studied.



The intersection of Venice and Sepulveda Boulevards is very congested at peak periods, and would likely delay trains waiting for their turn signal phase.

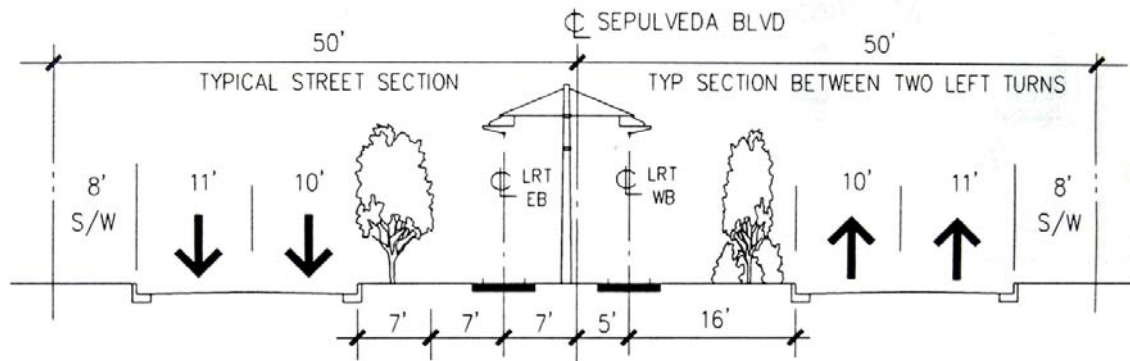


Travel time estimates based on the current Blue Line schedule suggest this route may be as much as **10 minutes – 25% – slower** due to its one-mile-longer length, 35 mph vs. 55 mph top speed, and intersection delays.

An **aerial curve** here is a possible mitigation (and could transition into the **hill** visible on Sepulveda, eliminating that steep grade). If considered, it should be planned **not to preclude a future extension** farther west on Venice Boulevard.

- **Loss of street trees and parking on Sepulveda Blvd.**

The Sepulveda Blvd. section drawing (below) from the 2001 *Draft EIS/EIR* (Figure 2D-7) shows narrowed sidewalks and loss of street parking.



L. Sepulveda Boulevard North of Rose Avenue

South of the Santa Monica Freeway the existing 5-foot sidewalk plus 8-foot parkway would be narrowed to an 8-foot sidewalk, **losing all its street trees** (mature magnolias here along UCLA married student housing). The new curb line is shown in yellow.



North of the freeway Sepulveda is 14 feet narrower curb-to-curb. There it could lose street parking, 12 feet of parkway, all street trees (mature jacarandas and palms), and 6 feet of front yards.



- *School traffic noise*

Charnock Road Elementary School borders Sepulveda Boulevard (as Overland Avenue Elementary School borders Overland and Northvale Avenues). Planning for **student safety** is crucial at all school locations.

The LAUSD expressed concern in its 2001 *Draft EIS/EIR* comments about increases in already-severe **traffic noise** here.



- *Pipelines (all route options)*

We have heard about **petroleum pipelines** under the median of Venice Boulevard, under Sepulveda Boulevard, and along the right-of-way (this sign is just west of Overland Avenue).

We have also heard there is a major **water main** for the City of Santa Monica beneath the median of Olympic Boulevard.



West Los Angeles to Santa Monica

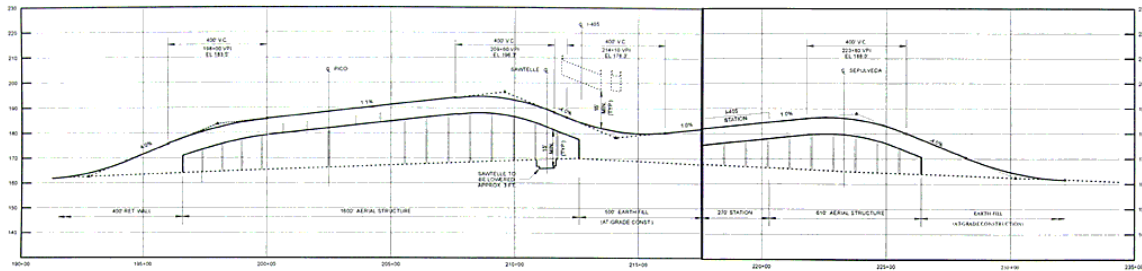
- **Sawtelle aerial station**

Just west of the San Diego Freeway the right-of-way forms a triangle west of Sawtelle and south of Pico. The tall building on the right is two blocks north in the **Olympic Blvd. business corridor**, within walking distance of a station here. The **landmark tree** on the left is visible in historic photos and should be preserved.



This could be a good location for a large **parking structure**.

The 2000 *Mid-City/Westside Transit Corridor Study* (Figure 2.27) suggested an overpass of Pico, Sawtelle, and Sepulveda Boulevards that fits beneath the I-405 bridge (below).



It's also important to plan for **connection here with potential BRT** along the I-405 HOV lanes, as well as with a potential **north-south rail link from LAX to the Valley**. The old **right-of-way** north from Expo along the **west side of Sepulveda Boulevard** could be a first step, to provide a rail shuttle connection, faster than Westwood Boulevard buses stuck in traffic, from the Expo Line to Westwood and UCLA.

- **Bundy aerial station**

Traffic on Bundy Drive is severe, frequently backing up all the way from Olympic to Pico Boulevards in both directions. The aerial station called for here in the 2001 *Draft EIS/EIR* is necessary.



- **Cloverfield-Bergamot Station**

Santa Monica’s Water Garden is across Olympic Boulevard from the potential station site east or west of 26th Street.

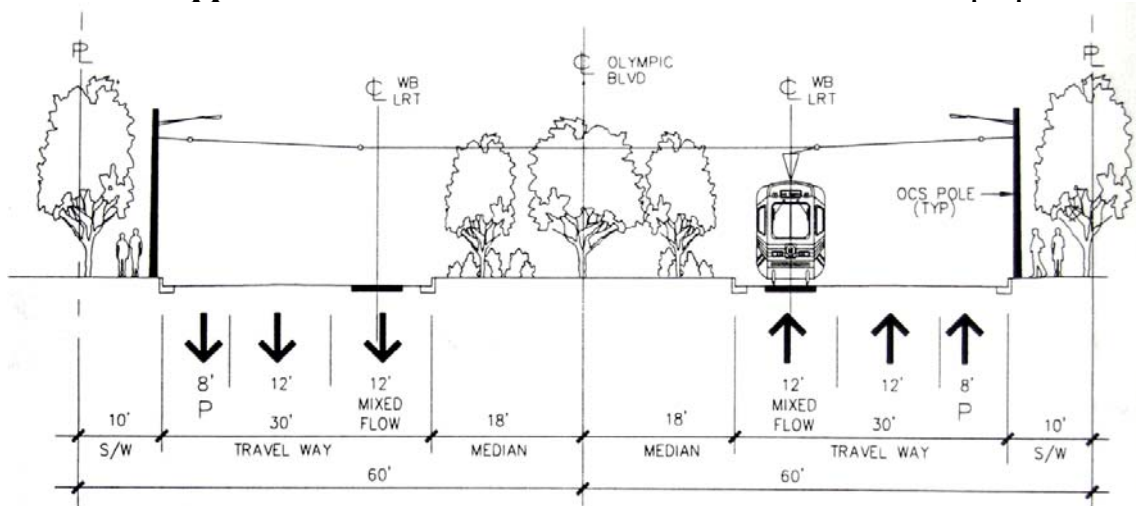
Although not specified in the 2001 *Draft EIS/EIR*, **severe traffic on Cloverfield Boulevard** to and from the I-10 freeway may require grade separation.



Bergamot Station has become a major arts venue since being purchased with transit funds by the City of Santa Monica. The 2001 *Draft EIS/EIR* concept of using it as a surface parking lot does not fit either this intensely developed business district or the transit-oriented development (TOD) and likely structured parking that would best complement this station site.

- **Olympic Blvd. median and Santa Monica stations**

The **grass and coral tree median** of Olympic Blvd. in Santa Monica west of 20th Street is a local landmark. The 2001 *Draft EIS/EIR* (Figure 2D-10) suggested the tracks be next to the median and would preserve the trees (above). Safety, speed, and less traffic here **support a dedicated track lane**, not the 2001 **mixed flow** proposal.



P. Olympic Boulevard West of 20th Street

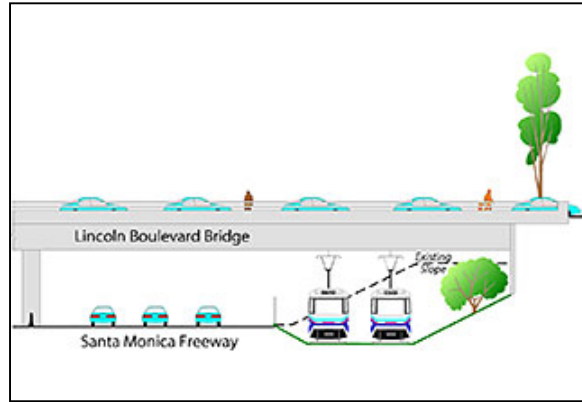
There should be a **third Santa Monica station added around 14th-17th Streets** to serve the mid-city area, especially Santa Monica College to the south and Santa Monica-UCLA Medical Center to the north, as well as the dense population and many other adjacent businesses here. Lighter local traffic makes this a good location for **parking**.

The resulting station spacing in Santa Monica would be consistent with the Blue Line and Expo Line on Flower Street in downtown Los Angeles, the Gold Line in Pasadena, the Blue Line in downtown Long Beach, and even Red Line subway stations that are as close as ½ mile apart.

- *Lincoln Blvd. underpass*

An alternative to consider at Lincoln Boulevard is to **use unused width under the existing Lincoln bridge** over I-10, to reduce the visual impact of an aerial structure crossing Lincoln.

Another consideration is a future interface with a potential Green Line extension up Lincoln Boulevard. A future routing could be **north on Lincoln, east on Expo, and then north along the I-405 corridor to the Valley.**



- *Santa Monica terminus*

We support the **Santa Monica terminus** station location on the southeast corner of 4th and Colorado (right side of photo) proposed in the 2001 *Draft EIS/EIR* and specified in the City of Santa Monica’s adopted Civic Center Specific Plan.

This is within a three-block walk of the Santa Monica Pier, Third Street Promenade and downtown businesses, and Civic Center. Major bus lines run on 4th Street and the downtown Transit Mall loop on Broadway and Santa Monica Boulevards.



Bus Rapid Transit Option

- *BRT wouldn't provide LRT's needed speed and capacity*

A key question is **what standard of “bus rapid transit” would this alternative be?** Would it have the grade separations of the light rail option, or be entirely at-grade like the Valley's Orange Line?

If the former, its capital cost would be nearly as much as light rail, but travel would be slower due to unavoidable delays at remaining signalized intersections and the transfer to rail in Culver City.

If the latter, buses would slow or stop at all intersections, like the Orange Line was forced to do for safety, even further hurting its speed and ridership.

In both cases **operating costs would be significantly greater than rail**, due to many more vehicle operators:



One light rail train (228 seats)



= **Four** articulated buses (@57 seats)



= **Six** regular low-floor buses (@38 seats)

The Expo Line is projected to carry over 50,000 daily riders. To match the planned capacity of a 3-car train every 5-6 minutes would require a bus a minute in each direction – **a bus every 30 seconds**. This is not possible without either the cost of full grade separation or significant intersection delays.

Either version of bus rapid transit alternative for phase 2 would be slower and have lower capacity than the light rail extension this corridor requires.